

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Rep. Harry E. Mitchell this evening issued the following statement in response to the President's address to the nation:

"Tonight, the President proposed an escalation of the war in Iraq - an escalation that many of our nation's most senior military leaders have advised against.

"In November, Army General John Abizaid testified before Congress that U.S. generals on the ground were skeptical about escalating the number of U.S. combat troops in Iraq. According to Abizaid, the generals said that deploying more troops would hinder our mission to train Iraqi forces to provide for their own security and stability.

"The situation on the ground was grave two months ago, and I think we have a right to know what has changed since then, and why it requires an escalation.

"I think the people I represent want to know how we're going to bring our involvement in Iraq to an end."

Mitchell referred to remarks made by Abizaid during his testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on Nov. 15. Abizaid said, "Senator McCain, I met with every divisional commander, General Casey, the corps commander, General Dempsey, we all talked together. And I said, in your professional opinion, if we were to bring in more American Troops now, does it add considerably to our ability to achieve success in Iraq? And they all said no. And the reason is because we want the Iraqis to do more. It is easy for the Iraqis to rely upon to us do this work. I believe that more American forces prevent the Iraqis from doing more, from taking more responsibility for their own future." [See: <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0611/15/cnr.05.html> ]